



News Release

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***Forests Under Fire Explores the Future of our Imperiled Western Forests
ERI Documentary to Air April 28***

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. – Ecologists say our treasured ponderosa pine and dry mixed conifer forests of the American West are under attack from seemingly every direction. Armies of bark beetles, devastating disease outbreaks and unstoppable infernos threaten the beauty, function and life of these important wildlands and the people who depend upon them.

How these forests became degraded, how the damage has escalated in the last century and how time is running out to restore health and sustainability to these landscapes will be explored in a 30-minute documentary, ***Forests Under Fire: The Race to Restore the American West***. The program airs at 7 p.m., Saturday, April 28 on NAZ Television, Channel 4.

Meantime, as wildfire season approaches in Arizona – one of the most fire-ravaged states in the country – the combination of a dry winter, windy spring and warming climate has our unhealthy landscapes at risk again.

“There are three zones in northern Arizona that are particularly vulnerable right now and at risk for dangerously large, unnaturally intense crown fires,” said Ecological Restoration Institute Executive Director Wally Covington, Ph.D. “If a fire were to get started on a typical dry, windy day in Oak Creek Canyon, in the Payson area or in the White Mountains, we could see the same destructive fire behavior on a scale of hundreds of thousands of acres as we experienced with last year’s Wallow Fire.”

Land managers, scientists, elected officials, environmentalists and businesses have joined in a race against time to examine and treat some 2.4 million forested acres across the Mogollon Rim. This effort, the Four Forest Restoration Initiative or 4FRI, is the largest forest restoration project ever attempted.

“Our first analysis area is nearly a million acres. It’s a daunting task trying to pull together all the data to have site-specific information as to what we need to do out on the ground to restore these systems,” said Forest Service 4FRI Team Leader Henry Provencio. “The 4FRI collaborative stakeholders’ group has really helped us with that process.”

“Mother Nature will dramatically reset forest conditions with insects, disease and fire. Or, we can do it by wise tinkering that let’s us put these systems in a condition that these natural forces play a more natural role in the process,” said Forest Service Southwest Regional Forester Corbin Newman. “The urgency has been around for 10 years and it’s doing nothing but growing.”

Forests Under Fire: The Race to Restore the American West is a production of the Ecological Restoration Institute at Northern Arizona University.

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